Computer Scientist Lends a Hand to Farmers, Young Women

Lisa Katusiime and Isaac Omiat co-founded the AgroMarketDay application in Uganda. (Courtesy of Lisa Katusiime)

In Uganda, the local agriculture markets that many small-scale farmers depended on were inefficient. Often, neither customers nor farmers knew which markets would be open on which days. So farmers only had access to a limited number of customers. That limited their profits.

Farmers' profits were further complicated by middlemen who knew the current market price of a product while the farmers did not. The middlemen could buy from a farmer and sell the product at a higher price to customers.

As a student at Makerere University in Kampala, YALI Network member Lisa Katusiime decided she could do something to make the country's agriculture marketing system more efficient. With fellow student Isaac Omiat, in 2013 she created AgroMarketDay, a mobile phone application that enables smallholder farmers to get their products to the right markets at the right time and at the right price.

The app also enables farmers to access farm inputs like seeds, fertilizers and tools. The application features information about modern methods of raising crops, livestock and fish. The co-founders won startup funding from communications company Orange Uganda Limited. Katusiime, now 24, who in 2014 received a bachelor's degree in software engineering, serves as AgroMarketDay's business development manager. Omiat, now 27, a former farmer, is the venture's lead developer.

"I have a clear, logical mind with a practical approach to problem-solving and a drive to see things through to completion," says Katusiime, who also co-founded Likamis Software Limited, a company that develops computer and mobile phone applications and games. Her passion for information and communications technology in agriculture enabled her to reach out to youth involved in the Young Farmers Coalition of Uganda. An advocate for girls in communications, she is a member of Afchix, or African Women in Technology, which encourages girls to study for careers in computers and technology. In 2013, she was invited to speak at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing in the United States.

"I advise young women interested in information and communications technology (ICT) to go ahead and pursue their careers. ... Women, too, can make it in the ICT space," says the semi-finalist for the 2014 U.S. Global Innovation through Science and Technology competition for science and technology entrepreneurs from emerging economies.

"The competition helped me to create awareness for AgroMarketDay and got me to interact with many people, which greatly helped me improve my marketing skills," she says.

"I advise young African entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs to identify their passion, follow it, dream it and live it, because when you identify your passion you are unstoppable," she says.

Of YALI she says, "It inspires and motivates me every time I see fellow young people's achievements featured."

What Business Models Work in Africa? Part 2

Amrote Abdella (Courtesy of Amrote Abdella)

We asked Amrote Abdella, director of Startup Engagement & Partnerships, Africa Initiatives at Microsoft, to tell YALI Network members about business models that work in Africa.

Question:

How have the various business models developed in Africa over recent years?

Abdella:

- *Collaboration with innovation hubs.* The last two years have seen a proliferation of technology hubs, incubators and accelerators that have been used as mechanisms to engage the community of a new generation of young Africans trying new ideas. The World Bank estimates the existence of about 90 innovation hubs in over 30 countries in Africa. AfriLabs, a pan-African network of technology and innovation hubs, makes up 35 of these. Two of these hubs, the Co-Creation hub in Nigeria and the iHub in Kenya, have been recognised as best-performing models. The iHub has launched 152 successful local startups to date, encouraging the local Kenyan government to commit to establishing a tech hub in each of its 47 counties.

- *Startup funding.* According to 4Afrika, startups at different phases require different types of financing. In Africa, over the years it has moved from savings and loans from family and friends to a more formal form of funding, including seed funding from competitions and equity financing, among others.

- *Public-private partnerships.* The [informal sector contributes about 55 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP](#), while SMEs [small and medium-sized businesses] make up 95 percent of African businesses. Though there's been mostly some separate efforts from both the public and the private sector, there's still a partnership opportunity to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive in areas of skills transfer, financing, incentives and tendering process that promotes small business.

- *Online platforms*. There's an emergency of online platforms for entrepreneurs in Africa providing resources, such as [Biz4Afrika](#), [She Leads Africa](#) and online retailing platforms such as [Fashpa.com](#) and [Skrill](#). The platforms need to grow from being a resource center to an avenue that creates

meaningful contacts for intra-African and international trade, hence enabling the entrepreneurs to monetize.

Question:

How do you define a successful business in Africa?

Abdella:

- Sustainable monetization.

- Ability to scale the solutions.

- Ability to create job opportunities.

What Business Models Work in Africa? Part 1

Amrote Abdella (Courtesy of
Amrote Abdella)

We asked Amrote Abdella, director of Startup Engagement & Partnerships, Africa Initiatives at Microsoft, to tell YALI Network members about business models in Africa.

Question:

What are the top four business models that work in Africa?

Abdella:

1. Collaboration with innovation hubs and accelerators: Most technology companies (Microsoft, Google, IBM, etc.) connect startups to innovation hubs and accelerators from across Africa. [These] are instrumental in connecting developers and startups with the right partners to get the resources and support they need to get their ideas to the market.

Example: AfriLabs is a pan-African network of technology innovation hubs. It was founded in 2011 to build a community around rapidly emerging tech hubs — spaces that serve as physical nexus points for developers, entrepreneurs and investors. AfriLabs is working through these spaces to build an innovation infrastructure that will encourage the growth of Africa's knowledge economy by supporting the development of startups, technology and innovation.

2. Innovation grants/funding for startups: Based on the uniqueness and scalability of the solutions,

the startups are reviewed and by merit selected to receive the innovation grant. The funds enable local entrepreneurs who want to develop new innovative technology to solve Africa's and the world's challenges.

Example: AGIN, a Microsoft 4Afrika innovation grant recipient. AGIN's solution uses feature phones to provide valuable, relevant information to farmers while at the same time capturing vital data about the smallholder farmer, for example, size of farm, GPS location, soil composition, weather information, crops grown, previous yield, and so on, and uses this data to establish a credit profile for the farmer. This profile is then made available to key service providers like banks, insurance providers, agricultural input providers and buyers to gain visibility into the financial status of the farmer. Over 135K farmers are profiled through AGIN and actively consuming services on Azure and Hosted Exchange on feature phones.

3. Public-private partnerships: Multinationals and government bodies working together to provide an enabling environment and policies for entrepreneurs to thrive.

Example: M-KOPA is an SME [small/medium-sized enterprise] that provides "pay-as-you-go" renewable energy for off-grid households in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The East African governments offer VAT [value-added tax] exemption on all solar products, which is a big saving for small companies like M-KOPA.

4. Online platforms for entrepreneurs: These provide essential services and a platform for intra-Africa trade.

Example: Biz4Afrika is a growing Africa-wide network of SMEs designed to enable a sustainable and connected community of entrepreneurs that will have a meaningful impact on job creation, global competitiveness and wealth creation in the long run. In the past year alone, we've seen 140,000 SMEs go online across Africa — to offer and to consume services enabled by technology.

Disability, Inclusion Featured in Latest Live #YALICHAT

"*My exercise of my rights can be limited when it makes your exercise of your rights impossible.*" — *David Saperstein, U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom*

"*Disabled people and their family and friends must speak up when they believe that they are being disrespected or discriminated against.*" — *Judith Heumann, U.S. special adviser for international disability rights*

During a live, three-day Facebook Q&A that ended July 2, Heumann and Saperstein responded to

questions from YALI Network members about tolerance, disability and inclusion.

Here are excerpts from the chat:

Question:

How can we get empowered and mobilize our society and nation at large to recognize disability rights to enhance inclusion in employment and higher education?

Heumann:

You can become empowered by organizing with other persons with disabilities and other minorities in your community. Identify a high-level person to help advocate for the cause.

Question:

Too often, in [my country], people with a disability are found in the street fetching a livelihood. What is the responsibility of government to give hope to those people?

Heumann:

It is the responsibility of the disabled community to demand the government take steps toward equal access so that persons with disabilities can contribute to their societies.

Question:

What do you think can be done to move governments from taking a tokenist approach to addressing disability issues?

Heumann:

Collaboration with organizations outside the disability community is critical. Governments are moved when they know that disabled people and their families and friends participate in elections, run for office and play an active role in their communities.

My personal experience working at the local and national levels is that we, as disabled people, must learn how to present our messages clearly, [and] work with other groups who are working together, not only with the disabled.

Question:

We had a situation where a disabled female was selected to do nursing, but due to her disability, the nursing council of Malawi refused to take her. Can we say her right of choosing the educational field of her choice was violated? What strategies should government put in place to make sure that disabled people can freely embark on any activity that they wish to do?

Heumann:

She experienced discrimination that keeps her from accomplishing her goals. When I finished college, I was denied my teaching license because I couldn't walk. I challenged that decision, and was granted my [teaching] license.

Question:

I am an African living in the U.S. What do you suggest to religions that don't want to participate in gay and lesbian marriage? Will the churches lose their license as [nonprofits]?

Saperstein:

We are not advocating or forcing anyone to change their religious views. We merely advocate that all individuals, including LGBTI individuals, be treated with dignity, respect and fairness and given equal rights. Specifically, that LGBTI individuals not be subject to criminal sanctions and that they be protected from governmental or societal persecution.

Embracing Diversity

"Our Nation derives strength from the diversity of its population and from its commitment to equal opportunity for all. We are at our best when we draw on the talents of all parts of our society, and our greatest accomplishments are achieved when diverse perspectives are brought to bear to overcome our greatest challenges." — President Obama

Embracing diversity is not just a matter of social justice; it enriches countries and promotes human worth. Unfortunately, all around the world, individuals are subjected to discrimination, exclusion, persecution and violence for simply being "different."

Embracing diversity not only strengthens the human rights of minorities, but also fortifies societies as a whole. When a community recognizes the potential of all its citizens, it is more secure, stable, innovative, prosperous and able to address its problems.

This is an issue in which we all have a stake, and it touches on individuals, corporations and governments in every corner of the world. All communities must debate and discuss these issues and work together to drive positive change for all members of society. Change starts with educating ourselves and making a commitment to inclusive growth.

Starting on Tuesday, June 30, Special Adviser for International Disability Rights Judith Heumann and Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein will host a three-day Facebook chat, where they will discuss the intersection of religious tolerance, disability rights and human rights and provide recommendations on promoting diversity, combating stigma and countering violence.

Help push this conversation forward with your questions or comments. We look forward to hearing your ideas on how to improve diversity in your community.

Including People with Disabilities Pays Off for U.S. Businesses

This refreshable Braille keyboard enables people with visual disabilities to read information displayed on a computer. (©AP Images)

The strength of any country lies in its ability to tap the talents, skills and potential of all its citizens. In the United States, nearly one in five Americans has a physical or mental disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it possible for this population to participate fully in business, politics and the arts in the United States.

Signed into law in 1990, the ADA does these things:

- Prevents employers from discriminating against a qualified individual with a disability.
- Requires state and local governments to provide equal access to public programs and services such as public transportation.
- Ensures the equal enjoyment of goods, services and facilities of public places such as restaurants, hotels and theaters.
- Compels telecommunication companies to provide functionally equivalent services to persons with disabilities, such as closed captioning for the hearing-impaired.
- Makes it illegal to retaliate against individuals who exercise or help others exercise their rights under the law.

Implementing the ADA has spurred innovation, improved employee performance, opened new business markets and provided all Americans the benefits of an inclusive society. However, many businesses, local governments and other entities initially expressed concerns about implementing the ADA. For example, some business owners worried about how hiring persons with disabilities would affect their operating costs, product quality and employee productivity.

Over the past 25 years, some concerns proved legitimate and were addressed through tax incentives and legislative revisions. Other concerns proved fallacious. Let's take a closer look.

Concern:

Employing people with disabilities will negatively affect efficiency and operations.

Reality:

The ADA does not require employers to hire anyone who is not qualified for the job. Candidates who do not possess the skills, experience or education — or who cannot perform essential job duties — are not considered qualified and are not protected under the ADA.

While the ADA does not mandate the hiring of unqualified candidates, hiring qualified candidates who happen to have a disability has proved good for business. People with disabilities bring a different perspective to the workplace, including a better understanding of how to meet the needs of other people with disabilities. This translates into new processes, products and services. The hearing-impaired, for example, pioneered the use of SMS messaging long before it became the de facto mode of communication for mobile phone users.

By employing people with disabilities, a business attracts new market segments not only through innovation, but also through diversity. According to a 2006 consumer attitudes survey, 87 percent of U.S. consumers prefer to patronize businesses that hire people with disabilities.

Concern:

Accommodating persons with disabilities will be too costly.

Reality:

The majority of employees with disabilities do not require accommodations. According to a 2012 Job Accommodation Network study, 57 percent of accommodations cost nothing to make, while the rest typically cost around $500. The IRS also offers an annual tax credit of up to $5,000 to small businesses that provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation could include providing alternatives to architectural barriers — such as a ramp in place of stairs — or acquiring new equipment such as screen-reading software.

U.S. employers have reaped other benefits from implementing the ADA. That same Job Accommodation Network study found that providing reasonable accommodations resulted in retaining valuable employees, increasing employee productivity and eliminating new-employee training costs. Employers also reported boosts to overall morale and productivity.

A North Carolina snack food company, for example, recorded a jump of 70 percent to 95 percent in productivity after hiring employees with disabilities. Employee retention increased, and absenteeism dropped.

Concern:

Serving persons with disabilities will negatively affect business.

Reality:

Like accommodating disabled employees, accommodating customers with disabilities is good for business. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, persons with disabilities represent the United States' third-largest market segment. Serving the 54 million Americans with disabilities gives a business access to more than $200 billion in discretionary consumer income.

A major U.S. hotel chain, for example, noticed a 260 percent increase in net revenues after it began offering ADA-compliant rooms and training staff to serve guests with disabilities.

The YALI Times

In May, YALI Network members were invited to [share stories](#) of people creating positive change in their communities. More than 100 stories were submitted. From young women enhancing education with technology to public servants helping citizens fight corruption in their court system, each entry revealed the great work YALI Network members are doing to improve their communities. Click on the titles in blue below to expand each section and read the winning submissions.

In Nigeria, Change Comes One Piece at a Time

In parts of Nigeria, poor sanitation, indiscriminate waste disposal, inadequate waste separation and ill-conceived landfill locations have resulted in the constant outbreak of cholera, typhoid, malaria and sometimes death.

Recently, there has been a loud cry from citizens about the effect poorly managed waste is having on the environment. Some Nigerians have taken the lead to curb this menace. One is Cajetan Okeke, co-founder of Alamonk Recyclers Ltd.

"Alamonk Recyclers is a hybrid company that recycles tons of waste each month. It also teaches community members the best steps to proper waste management. In an interview with Okeke, he said the idea was born out of a bid to save the environment and to make money from waste.

"The tonnes of recyclables that end in unsanitary landfills gave me concern and inspired me to begin a recycling company," Okeke said.

"Focusing on recycling will not effect adequate social change on the people," Okeke added. "In this line we have initiated programs that will educate the people on proper waste separation, disposal and recycling, because recycling is more effective when it is community-based."

"Alamonk Recyclers is still at the startup stage. The company operates in Abia state, Nigeria, and has attracted federal grants and state support. Alamonk Recyclers participates in a live radio program where people talk about the steps to managing waste properly and listeners can call in to give their opinion and ask questions. The company also moves around streets, collects people's waste and gives incentives for those who separate their waste.

"Okeke and his team believe that a veritable step in this journey is education and, ultimately, a mindset change. Together with his team, Okeke is working hard to reach as many people as possible.

"It is a change that when embraced by many will be beneficial to the world at large. Even little actions affect the world with time.

How Shalom Beat the Stigma of HIV

For every story of a life claimed by AIDS, there is another of bravery, compassion and solidarity.

Shalom Kaseketi's history is one such story.

Kaseketi did not choose to remain silent about his HIV status and the stigma around it. Now 19, he was born with the disease and went public about his status when he was only 12. In so doing, he has become a role model for his peers.

In 2006, I accompanied the young Kaseketi, then a youth ambassador for an NGO, as he discussed HIV prevention with young people in schools, support groups and churches, at sports events and even in their homes. He said then that he had lost three sisters, a brother and his father to the disease.

These days, Kaseketi stands tall and proud at about two metres. He has a mellifluous voice, a positive spirit and a forward outlook. He puts aside his own concerns and talks of his new project.

"There has been a lot of alcohol and drug abuse in the area, so I decided to move in. … I started a football team and now I am a coach," Kaseketi said. He helps the kids see that there is more to life than just drinking and drug abuse.

Kaseketi acquired the disease from his HIV-positive mother, who is still alive. Speaking of his 19 years of living with HIV, Kaseketi admitted that it was not easy going through the education system. Stigma, he said, is still an issue that many children living with the virus struggle with every day in schools.

"You can't force stigma out. In one way or another I have experienced it even in this day and age," Kaseketi said. "I have seen kids crying, telling me they don't know what to do. You don't know whether it is something you should confront or you just talk to the people themselves. It is really tough."

Environmental Group Breaks from Routine

Purity Wanjohi and Kevin Okech are the two faces behind Mazingira Safi Initiative (MSI), a community-based organization in Nairobi, Kenya, with a mission to inspire change in how Nairobi

residents treat the environment.

The two have run the initiative alongside other members for almost two years and have shown dedication in mobilizing volunteer students and youths to achieve this mission.

In March, they rallied their team to do something different from the routine community cleanups and environmental education. March is Women's History Month, a theme meant to recognize, appreciate and celebrate all that women and girls contribute to society — and to create more awareness of the need to support them.

In recognition of the month and its theme, Wanjohi and Okech organized a visit to Maryfaith Children's Home, a rescue shelter for sexually and physically abused girls. Located in Riruta Satelite, Nairobi, the shelter houses more than 50 girls ranging from infancy to age 18.

Wanjohi and Okech raised roughly $200 to purchase foodstuffs, sanitary towels and toiletries, items the shelter determined were most needed. The girls were very happy, and they enjoyed hanging out with the MSI team.

Despite the fun, the visit was also sobering. Interacting with the girls and listening to their stories, one is made to realize that there is a dark force detaching humans from their sense of humanity. Most of these girls had gone through dehumanizing experiences in the hands of their guardians, denying them a chance to hope and dream.

The team from MSI was very deliberate to encourage them to keep hope alive. The innocence of children has to be protected and a sense of confidence built inside them.

The shelter's founder, Margaret Mwangi, said in one session, "I need the government to protect our girls, the law to defend them, and the community to accept them."

The visit was simply a reminder that we all cannot cease to counter ignorance, increase awareness to stop domestic violence, and support young girls and women to pursue their dreams. There are little things that we all can do.

This article was written by Kevin Okech of Kenya and was submitted as part of a citizen journalism initiative. It has been edited for clarity and length. The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

Volunteer Helps Children Turn the Page

Shittu, a man in his 30s, read the title of a book and asked the owner for its meaning. An implausible idea for some, but worse realities exist in Nigeria where an estimated 40 million to 45 million people are illiterate.

Thousands of preteens cannot boast of Shittu's English language proficiency, and is it any wonder when the education sector received 10.7 percent of the national budget in 2014?

While most young people take delight in using social media to revile the first lady of Nigeria on her gaffes and grammatical blunders, people such as Chisomebi Okoroafor, an architect by training, a project manager and YALI Network member by choice, take positive steps to battle semi-illiteracy

among youth.

Okoroafor gives her time and finances as a volunteer in children-centered initiatives such as Slum2School and Feed-A-Child. Every year, Okoroafor coordinates activities in summer camps for disadvantaged primary school students. In August 2013, she joined the volunteer staff of the Education Resource Group Summer Camp, a subsidiary of the Awesome Treasures Foundation.

The staff tutored 120 children ages 10–15, selected from government schools in Ilupeju vicinity in Lagos state. The children were taught subjects such as general mathematics, English, science, French, etiquette and basic sex education.

Okoroafor also holds art classes for some children in her neighbourhood. She plans to start book clubs to help children older than 12 years of age learn to read.

"In 10 years, I want to have made a tangible impact in my nation in a positive way," Okoroafor says.

This article was written by Patricia Ogunleye of Nigeria and was submitted as part of a citizen journalism initiative. It has been edited for clarity and length. The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

Stories with Purpose: Inspiring Action and Change

Stories with purpose don't just materialize — they're strategically planned, creatively crafted and designed to achieve measurable outcomes.

From the oral traditions of the past to the digital techniques of the present, stories have always been a crucial part of human communication. However, with the advent of the Internet and digital media, the face of storytelling has changed. So, how can we combine age-old traditions with emerging technologies to ensure that your stories have maximum motivating power and impact?

That's where Hatch for Good comes in. The site is a great place to start if you are seeking to leverage the power of storytelling — something that nonprofits often find exciting but also daunting. Hattaway Communications, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, developed this platform specifically for storytelling in the digital age, so that people and organizations that have big ideas can connect to the tools and strategies they need — to create high-impact stories that inspire others to take action.

After launching Hatch for Good in late 2014, members of the Hattaway team traveled across the globe to Kenya, India and Thailand to help social impact organizations become storytelling organizations. I was fortunate enough to be a part of that team and witnessed firsthand the most

immediate storytelling needs of nonprofits. Every region has its set of unique challenges, but there were three crosscutting areas of interest.

1. Building Strategy and Capacity.Often, social impact organizations dive into storytelling without articulating clear goals, understanding the interests and motivations of key audiences, or setting measurable objectives.

   Our [Strategy Toolkit](#) is carefully designed to help build your "Narrative Framework," the overarching story that helps provide structure and consistency for all individual stories your organization will tell.

   To complement your strategy, the [Capacity Toolkit](#) is designed to help you understand the resources and skills you need to become a storytelling organization.

2. Creating Stories that Capture Attention and Imagination.In today's competitive media environment, only the most compelling content gets noticed and shared. Storytelling is both an art and a science — and stories for social impact must show people as active agents of change, who play a central role in creating solutions to the problems they face.

   In the [Content Toolkit](#), we'll help you sketch your story based on the Social Impact Story Map adapted from a tried-and-true formula seen in narratives from Homer to Hollywood.

3. Engaging Communities and Measuring Impact.With an inordinate number of digital tools available, social impact organizations struggle to understand which to use to most effectively engage their audiences. There's no one-size-fits-all solution. The [Platform Toolkit](#) aims to provide customized tips based on your audiences and technology. While I was in Nairobi, most organizations found our guides on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to be very practical and useful for promoting their stories. [These guides](#) contain best practices for making the most of popular social networks — whether you're a social media expert or a beginner.

   To understand what's working in your stories, you can evaluate the impact of your storytelling on an ongoing basis — so you can learn what's working and adjust your strategy accordingly. Our [Evaluation Toolkit](#) and [guides](#) explain how best to measure the impact of your storytelling efforts.

We hope this is a helpful introduction to how you can harness the power of storytelling to communicate stories of impact, using a sound strategy, compelling content and the right digital tools — and inspire people to take action to create change worldwide.

Using Blogging to Tell Your Organization's Story

The [YALI Network blog](#) is a platform that enables us to share powerful stories of YALI Network members and to provide expert advice on subjects YALI Network members care about. You, too, can use blogging to share your stories and engage your audience.

Blogs are excellent Web-based platforms to host and maintain records of creative content and stories. Your blogging platform can host text, images and embedded videos, and provide a landing page that can be linked to various sources of traditional and social media channels/platforms.

There are multiple platforms available for blogging, including [WordPress](#), [Joomla](#), [Django](#) and [Drupal](#), among others. These platforms are versatile and allow you to create blogs that can expand reach and resources by connecting with audiences emotionally.

The most effective way to share stories on your blog is to plan ahead and create a detailed editorial calendar for producing original content. Most blogging platforms have built-in capabilities to schedule and publish posts according to your organization's editorial calendar.

You can increase the visibility of your blog by being active and consistent, by sharing your blog posts through social media and email, by inviting experts in your field to contribute as guest bloggers, and by talking about stories that tie into current events.

This article is adapted from Hatch for Good's [Guide to Blogging and CMS](#). Hatch for Good is a platform that provides people and organizations with the tools they need to create powerful stories and inspire positive action in the digital age. Visit [Hatch for Good's website](#) to view additional resources.

[Using Twitter to Tell Your Organization's Story](#)

Every month, thousands of YALI Network members engage policymakers, experts and entrepreneurs during exclusive #YALIChats on [Twitter](#). But that isn't all that Twitter can do for you.

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging tool to send and read short, 140-character text messages, called "tweets." Users access Twitter through its website interface, desktop application, SMS or mobile device application.

Twitter is often used for instantly spreading news and information. It can be compared to a news channel — you can discover news as it's happening, learn more about topics that are important to you and get the inside scoop in real time.

If you have something quick to say and have the capacity to say it often, Twitter could be your platform of choice. Twitter is also heavily used for live tweeting and live events.

The most effective way to share stories on Twitter is to plan ahead by building an editorial calendar and scheduling your tweets in advance with applications like Hootsuite, TweetDeck or Buffer. Plan to post at least three tweets per day. Short and simple text and photos work best.

You can maximize your visibility on Twitter by starting discussions with influential people, posing questions, following others and using relevant hashtags in your tweets.

This article is adapted from Hatch for Good's Guide to Twitter. Hatch for Good is a platform that provides people and organizations with the tools they need to create powerful stories and inspire positive action in the digital age. Visit Hatch for Good's website to view additional resources.